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General Assembly

Official Records

Disarmament Commission

232nd Meeting
Thursday, 2 December 1999, 10 a.m.
New York

Chairman: Mr. Abdelaziz . . . . . (Egypt)

In the absence of the Chairman, Ms. Arce de Jeannet (Mexico), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.30 a.m.

Opening of the session

The Acting Chairman (*spoke in Spanish*): I declare open the 1999 organizational session and the 232nd meeting of the Disarmament Commission.

As in past years, the Commission is convened today for a brief session to deal with organizational matters related to its 2000 substantive session, including the election of a new Bureau, the appointment of the Chairmen of Working Groups I and II and the adoption of a draft provisional agenda for the upcoming substantive session.

Adoption of the agenda

The Acting Chairman (*spoke in Spanish*): If there are no objections, I shall take it that the Commission wishes to adopt the provisional agenda contained in document A/CN.10/L.45.

It was so decided.

Election of the Chairman and other officers

The Acting Chairman (*spoke in Spanish*): It is my understanding that consultations are under way in the various regional groups regarding their candidates for the chairmanship and other posts. As those consultations have not yet come to an end, I would propose that the Commission return to this item at a later date. May I take it that members accede to that proposal?

It was so decided.

The Acting Chairman (*spoke in Spanish*): In that connection, I would note that the communication sent to the Chairmen of the regional groups with respect to candidatures for Commission offices for 2000 included a table showing the member States that have in recent years occupied the posts of Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Rapporteur. I hope that this table will be of help in the selection of candidates.

Review of the resolution adopted by the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session relating to the Disarmament Commission

The Acting Chairman (*spoke in Spanish*): As members of the Commission are aware, the General Assembly yesterday adopted resolution 54/56 A, entitled "Report of the Disarmament Commission". Paragraphs 7 and 8 of that resolution bear directly on our work. Paragraph 7 reads as follows:

> "Recommends that the Disarmament Commission, at its 1999 organizational session, adopt the following items for consideration at its 2000 substantive session:
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> "(a) [To be considered at the organizational session of the Disarmament Commission]

00-33810 (E)

This record contains the original texts of speeches delivered in English and interpretations of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to original speeches only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned, *within one week of the date of publication*, to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-178. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

"(b) [To be considered at the organizational session of the Disarmament Commission]".

Both items are accompanied by a footnote that reads as follows:

"In accordance with General Assembly decision 52/492".

Paragraph 8 reads as follows:

"Requests the Disarmament Commission to meet for a period not exceeding three weeks during 2000 and to submit a substantive report to the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session".

Draft provisional agenda for the 2000 substantive session of the Disarmament Commission

The Acting Chairman (*spoke in Spanish*): The draft provisional agenda for the 2000 substantive session of the Disarmament Commission is contained in document A/CN.10/1999/CRP.7, which has been distributed this morning; I hope all delegations have it before them.

As members can see, items 4 and 5 are blank. Intensive consultations have been held, but we have not yet arrived at an agreement. Until we arrive at such an agreement, I suggest that we do not formally adopt the draft provisional agenda contained in A/CN.10/1999/CRP.7, that we simply take note of it and that, once we have come to an agreement on the two substantive matters to be considered by the Disarmament Commission in the year 2000, then we move on to the formal adoption.

If there are no comments, I shall take it that delegations agree with this approach.

Mr. Pesola (Finland): I now seek the Chair's advice as to whether it would be possible to put forward at this time a proposal of the European Union to have, on an exceptional basis, just a two-week Disarmament Commission session next year.

The Acting Chairman (*spoke in Spanish*): We could deal with that matter under item 6 of A/CN.10/L.45, "Organizational matters", could we not? Let us decide that at this time we shall simply take note of A/CN.10/1999/CRP.7, which contains the draft provisional agenda for the 2000 substantive session of the Disarmament Commission and formally adopt the document once we have come to an agreement on the two substantive issues that the Disarmament Commission will consider next year.

It was so decided.

Organizational matters

The Acting Chairman (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to inform members that the Secretariat has reserved the dates 3 to 21 April 2000 for the substantive session of the Disarmament Commission. Those dates were decided on after careful consideration, especially taking into account the very full disarmament calendar for the year 2000. Nonetheless, some delegations have asked that we consider the possibility of reducing the duration of the session of the Commission in the year 2000 as an exceptional measure, without establishing a precedent.

I give the floor to the representative of Finland to formally present that proposal.

Mr. Pesola (Finland): On behalf of the European Union, I would like to formally put forward a proposal to have, on an exceptional basis, only a two-week Disarmament Commission session next year, taking into account that we also have a major disarmament conference close to the Commission's session, namely, the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) Review Conference. We should keep in mind that if we have only a two-week Disarmament Commission session, this will greatly facilitate the work of the smaller delegations when they are preparing for the NPT Review Conference, and also that the Disarmament Commission next year will start the consideration of two agenda items which will remain on its agenda for three years. So we hope that delegations will consider this proposal favourably.

Mr. Aikawa (Japan): I just want to say that Japan fully supports our Finnish colleague's proposal.

Ms. Healey (United States of America): The United States also supports the position of the European Union with regard to shortening the Disarmament Commission session this coming year.

Mr. Mesdoua (Algeria) (*spoke in French*): As we all know, next year is going to be a very busy year, not only for disarmament, but for the other fields covered by the United Nations. We have to prepare for the

Millennium Assembly; the Economic and Social Council's substantive session is also going to take place here in New York; the session of the preparatory committee for the Conference on small arms will also take place in New York; and there is the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) Review Conference. So it is going to be an extremely busy year.

My delegation has some difficulty backing the proposal just made. If our session is to be shortened as an exception, then the Commission should adopt a decision clearly stipulating that if the Disarmament Commission accepts a duration of two weeks for its substantive session — this will have to be formulated extremely clearly — this is an exception and will not serve as a precedent for other Disarmament Commission sessions. My delegation, in spite of these difficulties, could back this proposal, but the Disarmament Commission would have to take a formal decision making it clear that this decision to hold a two-week session next year is completely exceptional and will not constitute a precedent.

Mr. Khan (Pakistan): On this issue, to be very brief, my delegation is not in a position to support the proposal to curtail the duration of the Disarmament Commission session from two to three weeks. We have noted the view expressed by certain delegations, but my instructions from the capital, as of now, are still to insist that the Commission should meet for three weeks.

Mr. Cordeiro (Brazil) (*spoke in Spanish*): I simply want to add that Brazil can agree to reducing the length of the session from three to two weeks, with the understanding, as the delegation of Algeria said, that the decision is an exception and does not constitute a precedent. We would agree, therefore, to have the session start on 3 April and continue for two weeks.

The Acting Chairman (*spoke in Spanish*): In that case, it would seem that if we agree to the proposal of Finland on behalf of the European Union, the Disarmament Commission will meet from 3 to 14 April 2000.

Mr. Benítez Versón (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): After hearing the proposal made by the European Union I would like to state my delegations position that the Commission should hold its substantive session during the three weeks that we agreed on last year, when this arrangement was made as part of a package that was the subject of long and arduous negotiations, as all delegations are aware.

My delegation has no problem with the dates — 3 to 21 April — set aside by the Secretariat. Of course, we take note of the European Union proposal, and we will give it due consideration. But our initial reaction is that this Commission is one of the most important disarmament bodies, and we should not adopt any decision that might affect its functioning.

Past experience has shown that three weeks is already a very short time for a Disarmament Commission session; two weeks is hardly enough time to make any progress at all. Therefore, it would almost be a lost year for the consideration of the two new items before the Commission.

If one way of not interfering with other meetings next year would be to have the Commission meet at some other time during the course of the next year, instead of April, then of course my delegation could consider the other alternatives. But our current preference is to keep the three-week session and have us work on finding a date that would not conflict with other disarmament meetings scheduled for next year.

Mr. Du Preez (South Africa): My delegation remains flexible about the duration of the substantive session of the Disarmament Commission for the year 2000. We fully share the view expressed by Algeria that, on an exceptional basis, we could, at the appropriate time, agree to shorten next year's session, given the disarmament calendar and, in particular, given the fact that this session would be held just before the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) Review Conference.

We of course fully recognize that not all Members of the United Nations are parties to the NPT and that they would have different views in this regard, but we are also flexible about the specific timing of the Disarmament Commission session. If it is considered that the Disarmament Commission session could be held at a later date so as not to create problems — as my Finnish colleague pointed out — for some delegations in preparing for the NPT Review Conference, then I think we should consider this. Perhaps the Secretariat could guide us and indicate whether there are other time slots in what is already a very busy disarmament year, next year — taking into account the programme of the Conference on Disarmament and other meetings, such as the session of the preparatory committee for the 2001 small arms Conference.

But I think we need to be flexible on this, and we need to study it carefully. Given that the organizational session is to resume its work next year to discuss the agenda items, perhaps this issue can be considered at that time.

The Acting Chairman *(spoke in Spanish)*: I thank the delegation of South Africa for its flexibility on this item, and especially for its willingness to consider other alternatives with regard to the earlier proposal.

Ms. Martinic (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): I just wanted to say very briefly that my delegation has no problem with the European Union's proposal of having a two-week substantive session of the Disarmament Commission, on an exceptional basis next year. We, too, are flexible as to the actual dates and are ready to discuss other alternatives to the Secretariat's proposal.

Mr. Pesola (Finland): Just a quick reaction. One of the ideas of having only a two-week Disarmament Commission session before the Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) was that these two meetings would be back to back. Considering the positive response from various delegations, I would suggest that the Chair continue consultations and that these proposals remain on the table.

Mr. Oyugi (Kenya): I would like to apologize for not having been here at the beginning of the meeting. All the same, I would like to air briefly my delegation's view as regards the duration of the session. We think that we should look at the matter very carefully insofar as it concerns making exceptions and departing from the practice that we have followed all along. So for the moment my delegation is of the view that the duration should actually be the same as before: three weeks. We think that this talk of making an exception may be opening a Pandora's box.

This is what I would like to say for the time being.

The Acting Chairman *(spoke in Spanish)*: If no other delegation wishes to express its point of view on this issue, we will continue our consultations on the Finnish proposal. At the same time, we take note of the other possible alternatives that have been suggested this morning.

Before we conclude our consideration of this item, I would like to give the floor to the representative of the Secretariat so he can give us a few clarifications on the deadline by which we need to have a final position on this issue. I believe that the scheduling of conferences for next year requires that we confirm the dates for our session.

Mr. Alasaniya (Secretary of the Disarmament Commission): At this stage I would prefer to have all the charts in hand to show the delegations. But what I have been told by the Conference Services Planning Unit is that all the slots and, what is most important, all the teams of interpreters, are taken well into July. And July, as I understand it, is not acceptable for the Conference on Disarmament members — or usually it is not. I have not checked with them lately, but I take the risk of saying that July will not be acceptable for them.

However, since the consultations will be going on, I will again check with the Conference on Disarmament ambassadors as well as Conference Services, and will prepare the chart showing clearly the occupation of rooms — of conference rooms, since we need large conference rooms for both Working Groups — and also the schedule of the teams of interpreters. It needs to be understood that we cannot bring any additional teams from outside, because the Disarmament Commission does not have any budget for this.

The Acting Chairman (*spoke in Spanish*): With regard to interpretation services, I would like to remind delegations that the package agreed on last year, which is contained in decision 52/492, notes that starting next year the Disarmament Commission will consider two substantive issues with a view to avoiding simultaneous meetings of the Working Groups. That was one of the main reasons why we decided to reduce the substantive issues from three to two.

With regard to interpretation services, we would not need interpretation teams for parallel sessions. In other words, one working group would meet in the morning and another in the afternoon. The Secretariat would have to inform us of the availability of interpretation services were it decided to hold meetings in July. At our next consultations, I would request the Secretariat to be so kind as to answer the questions raised this morning.

I should like to move on to the next issue. It will be recalled that the Disarmament Commission will have two substantive issues on its agenda next year. We shall therefore need two working groups. It is true that we do not yet have a final decision with respect to the substantive issues to be considered, but I would ask the regional groups to canvass themselves in order to

determine potential candidates for the chairmanships of these working groups. I hope that we will have a decision from the regional groups in this respect by our next consultations.

In previous years, along with the working groups we have established a committee of the whole to address substantive and organizational matters. I believe that we might keep this previous practice in mind. For now, I would ask delegations to consider the establishment of the two working groups.

I should also like to inform all delegations that, in accordance with provisions that have been adopted on the reform programme, all organizational matters must be settled in the Disarmament Commission's organizational sessions. However, as we do have questions pending — including the nomination of officers of the Bureau for the year 2000, the designation of the chairmen of the two working groups and, most importantly, the ongoing consultations on the substantive issues — I would suggest that we suspend our organizational session and resume once we have reached agreement on all pending issues. At the resumed session, we shall be able to take final decisions on each pending issue.

At this time, we are unable to set a date for the resumed organizational session. That will depend on the degree of progress of our consultations, but I should like to convey my desire that it be held at the latest in the first two weeks of January. This would entail our continuing informal consultations over the next two weeks this month and, if necessary, in early January as well. The next meeting of the resumed organizational session will be announced in good time in the *Journal*.

Mr. Mesdoua (Algeria) (*spoke in French*): I understand, Madam, that you said that a decision would have to be reached in December on the issues pending. I would draw your attention to the fact that the month of Ramadan begins on 8 December. It would be wise for you to take that into account. The Muslim members of many delegations must fast for a month. It would therefore be helpful if the meetings were held in the mornings, as we break our fasts at 4.30 p.m. Afternoon meetings would therefore be problematic for Muslim participants.

The Vice-Chairman (*spoke in Spanish*): I have taken note of the request to hold our consultations in the morning as of next week. I do not believe that should be a problem for delegations.

I should like to urge delegations to move forward in the consultations on substantive issues and organizational matters so that we can convene the resumed organizational session as soon as possible. As I said, that will depend on the progress made. I would note that the latest possible date for the resumed organizational session must fall in the first two weeks of January so that it does not conflict with delegations' or the Secretariat's work programmes.

I declare this organizational session of the Disarmament Commission suspended.

The meeting rose at 11.10 a.m.